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**Sam Okudzeto Ablakwa**

1 hr ·

I have followed media discussions of British High Commissioner Jon Benjamin's letter to the Speaker of Ghana's Parliament with much interest as the Ranking Member of Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs.

In contrast to those who have questioned why the said confidential letter was leaked to the media, I take a different view. I am elated this letter is now available to the media and the general public for open and frank discussions in the true spirit of transparency and good governance. This must be good for our country.

In any case, before this leak, this was the most poorly kept secret by the British High Commission as many of us including journalists have known about this for a considerable period of time perhaps even before the said 20th January, 2017 letter was written and dispatched to the Right Honourable Speaker.

The other poorly kept secret is the claim that there are some MPs holding dual citizenship in violation of Article 94 (2) (a) of the Constitution of Ghana. Again, I will contend that it's better to see some swift concrete action on this particular issue instead of it being used by some people for smear and blackmail within diplomatic circles. This definitely raises larger issues of how Parliamentary Candidates are vetted within our political parties and the collaborative role of the Electoral Commission, National Security and Diplomatic Missions; a discussion we will have to return to at a later date.

It must be understood very clearly, that if confirmed, what the three sitting Members of Parliament (MP) and a former MP are alleged to have done cannot be endorsed and must deserve strong condemnation and possible sanctions if need be. It is therefore commendable that Mr. Speaker has taken a serious view of this matter and has instituted the needed investigations. This is what is expected of working democracies just as the US Congress is currently doing in the case of General Michael Flynn.

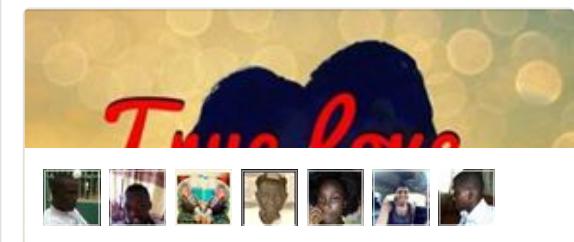
Reading through Jon Benjamin's letter however, one cannot help but notice a rather regrettable colonial mindset. He writes:

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- a) we will henceforth only entertain and prioritise requests for visas from MPs, if they are made through the parliamentary protocol office who should verify that there is an official, parliamentary reason for the proposed visit;
- b) however, MPs wishing to make private visits to the UK or to be accompanied on official visits by non-official relatives must apply online and through our Visa Application Centre at the Movenpick Hotel like any other applicant;
- c) could you kindly confirm whether and why it is legitimate for ex-MPs to continue to possess and use diplomatic passports, in some cases for many years after they have ceased to be parliamentarians? In that regard, we would humbly like to ask, Mr Speaker, what procedures are in place to ensure that diplomatic passports are removed forthwith from all those 133 former Members who have just ceased to be MPs?
- d) the net effect of such visa fraud by a very few Honourable MPs as outlined in this letter is to raise the bar of suspicion against all such applicants, which is of course regrettably to the huge disadvantage of those very many MPs who do act honourably at all times."

Quite clearly, to Mr. Jon Benjamin, issuing visas to Ghanaian MPs is such a great favour and a reward for good group behaviour. Therefore, because three sitting MPs may have misconducted themselves, all 275 MPs must now face the Head Master's (if not the colonial Governor's) wrath and sanctions. Such utter disrespect for our Parliament and our country regardless is most unacceptable.

If this is Mr. Benjamin's mindset even in dealing with the people's representatives, then one can begin to wonder how he treats the applications of the people of Ghana.

Never mind that visa application processes are not free and that the high fees most Ghanaians complain about are not refundable to applicants. Never mind that Ghanaians including thousands of fee paying students who travel to Britain do so with our own money which must be of some use to the British economy, Never mind that the UK Parliamentary Expenses Scandal of 2009 involved more than 300 MPs, (NOT 3 as in Ghana's case), with at least 6 of these UK MPs going to jail and yet no bar of suspicion has been raised by any Ghanaian "Head Master" in extending diplomatic courtesies to UK MPs but I guess that is the world we live in.

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through his Secretary, our Chief of Staff and our Foreign Minister on how diplomatic passports ought to be used and retrieved. Absolutely unbelievable! And by the way, Mr. Benjamin cannot be right when he asserts that MPs continue to use diplomatic passports "MANY YEARS" after they cease to be MPs when he knows that these diplomatic passports are valid for only five years while admittedly an MPs term is four years. The exaggeration was totally uncalled-for. He also knows that by practice these diplomatic passports are withdrawn upon ceasing to hold public office even if the retrieval is fraught with some challenges as all human institutions encounter.

Even though many of us have had concern about the modus operandi and non-diplomatic tendencies of the top-most British diplomat in Accra, I will not advocate hostility or reciprocal action on British MPs who will require visa services to visit Ghana as some have suggested because it is entirely possible that Mr. Benjamin's conduct and social media pontifications may not represent official British Government position. Fortunately, we have some good recent experience as a country in containing interesting High Commissioners since the days of Craig John Murray and more significantly, we should never forget that their postings to Ghana are not the least permanent.

What is permanent and which we must all continue to cherish is the unique bond of history and friendship that exists between our two countries which must constantly remind us that in the final analysis only mutual respect and equal rights triumph.

Samuel Okudzeto Ablakwa (MP)
Ranking Member, Foreign Affairs Committee of Parliament.

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**Richard Kirk-mensah** Nice piece. Very legitimate response

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**Samed Akalilu** Great piece

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 **Raymond Hodoameda** Great piece Hon.
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 **Seidu Alhaji** Good one Hon
Like · Reply · 1 hr

 **Fitzgerald Derek Goku** Nice submission.
Like · Reply · 57 mins

 **Richard Kirk-mensah** The guy is not high commissioner but a Ghanaian politician
Like · Reply · 1 · 57 mins

 **Salihu Shu'aibu Sarauta** Can't stop reading. Apt response.
Like · Reply · 52 mins

 **Enoch Yartey** God bless you Hon. This is telling us a lot about the Ghanaian Parliament under the leadership of Rev. Mike Oquaye....God is our savior
Like · Reply · 50 mins · Edited

 **Delali Amenyitor** Interesting piece.
Like · Reply · 49 mins

 **Yayra Freshwood Adadevoh** So I'm sharing it!
Like · Reply · 45 mins

 **Akaho Kwadzo** I am in tune with the write-up. God bless you my MP.
Like · Reply · 44 mins

 **Amashung Isaac** very surprised we are treating this issue lightly with the Headmaster.
Like · Reply · 43 mins

 **Yahaya Abdul-rahaman** Legitimately on course
Like · Reply · 34 mins

 **Nana Adwoa F. Konto** Wow...! Great piece 🙌 🙌
Like · Reply · 31 mins

 **Khalid Mohammed Suadique** Good
Like · Reply · 25 mins

 **Ayeta Babyjoy Rejoice** Good work honorable.
Like · Reply · 24 mins

 **Bentil Nyuiemedzi Asafo** Great piece
Like · Reply · 19 mins

 **Kofi Boamah Otokunor** Great piece. Sammy!! Jon Benjamin by some reason feels like he is the governor of this country. He still has that colonial mentality. I

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Klenam Dogbe Good piece, Sammy, my beef with him is when he was tweeting nonsense, we edged him on.

Like · Reply · 9 mins



Richard Kirk-mensah Parliament should petition the British government for his removal. No ambassador or high commissioner has engaged in our local politics like that man.

Like · Reply · 8 mins



Arthur Seyram Levuvu We like abuse of opportunities.

Like · Reply · 7 mins



Ibrahim Kasim Bawa Nice piece you said it all Hon

Like · Reply · 7 mins



Abdul-Razak Ramadan Great man...great statement

Like · Reply · 6 mins



Teresa Cross Codjoe Thank you Honourable Sam Okudzeto Ablakwa

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